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THE QUEEN'S CABINET AT VERSAILLES, SKETCHED BY CHARLES H. ISRAELS. See Page 156.

THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

THE QUEEN'S CABINET AT VERSAILLES.

BY CHARLES H. ISRAELS.



HE style of decoration which is associated with the reign of "*le grand monarque*" and his immediate successors, has had a wide and far-reaching effect upon the taste of the present day; and until the time when Eastlake made his influence felt in the adornment of our homes, the modern designer accepted the faults as well as the good qualities of this period without discrimination.

Born of a desire for magnificence, the architects of the time of Louis XIV allowed their minds and pencils to run riot amongst scrolls and curves, giving so much prominence to purely ornamental features of design that construction was almost entirely lost sight of in the profusion of detail; and the rococo style was carried to its greatest development.

Under Louis XVI the taste for classic art revived in France, and the influence of this revival was immediately felt upon the over-decorated work of the period; a straight line now and then found its way into designs for furniture and cabinet work, and many beautiful and harmonious examples are left to us that we may judge of the improvement consequent thereto. The consistency of the rococo style, however, atones to a great extent for its many short-comings in other respects, especially in interior work, and no examples of decoration past or present serve to illustrate the harmony of design as well as the apartments of the Palace of Versailles.

In this huge building even the smallest piece of furniture is made to correspond with the design of the room in which it is placed, and therefore results in a whole perfectly restful to the senses.

On account of the vastness of most of the apartments of Versailles, few can be taken as good models for the average home of our own day; and unfortunately these few are not generally shown to visitors; the greater part of the palace is at all times open to the public.

The judicious use of all powerful "*pour boire*," however, will generally obtain admission to the "Queen's little apartments," which are considered the most perfect examples of Louis XVI decoration extant in France. This suite of rooms was entirely remodeled for the unfortunate Marie Antoinette, and it was in her cabinet, a corner of which is shown in the illustration, that the ill-fated Queen hid herself in order to escape the fury of the people when they assailed the Palace in the early part of the revolution.

The cabinet is finished in light tones, the prevailing tints being white and gold, with the panels of the wainscot in pale blue. The wood-work extends from floor to ceiling, and is worked in one long panel from top of wainscot to the ceiling cove, and ornamented with designs of fruits, flowers, and grotesque animals, and having narrower panels on either side with an interlaced scroll motif extending from top to bottom.

A large mirror in a heavy gilt frame of a strictly classic design rests on the mantel over the handsome marble and onyx fire-place, resplendent with highly polished brass utensils, and the glass reflects the beautifully frescoed ceiling, showing in one large panel Venus and Loves at play, the flesh tones being admirably relieved by the pale blue of the back-ground.

Arranged upon the handsome marquetry floor, which is of maple and oak, the light furniture, covered with blue and cream white Gobelins tapestry, seems to stand firmly upon its base, an effect which is sadly wanting in some of the apartments of the earlier period, where carpets of a very light shade are employed.

The center-table, which is shown very prominently in the illustration, is the only piece of furniture in the room which is constructed of a dark wood; but a light effect is obtained by the brass trimmings and light onyx top. The doors of the room are sunk into the paneling of the walls so as to be invisible from the inside when closed, a custom which is still prevalent in Europe to-day; and their hardware as well as the sash-fastenings are splendid pieces of chased and gilded copper of extraordinary design, having been modeled by Gouthière. Sconces designed by the same artist ornament the walls at regular intervals, and the whole is completed by a few movable ornaments which rest on the mantel-shelf, and heavy blue hangings at the broad windows.

Now that the dictates of fashion have ordered the return of the styles of Louis XIV and XVI to our homes, this small apartment is one of the few which in its entirety can show us what can be done with the best work of that period, and how the defects of the earlier and over-ornamented examples may be avoided.

METALLIC ALLOYS AND PURE METALS IN DECORATION.



AN important branch of decoration is the making of gold alloys and their imitation. Copper, united to gold by repeated heatings, yields at first a brownish black color, which is removed by boiling or steeping the article in diluted sulphuric or hydrochloric acid, the proportion of acid being one to forty parts of water. The process of electro-plating has done away with a number of alloys formerly used. Pure gold and silver, for their better working as well as for their durability, require an alloy to adapt them for artistic production. All the gold pieces of money in the world are hardened with alloys. There are alloys that marvellously imitate gold. An alloy of gold and silver is similarly treated with nitric acid. Gold alloys will assume a light yellow color by being dipped in water in which has been dissolved saltpeter, alum and table salt. An alloy of copper and silver can have imparted to it any color or tint by the process of pickling in different solutions. All are aware of the fact that numerous metallic alloys are formed in the body of the earth, one metal being frequently incorporated with the other. All Japanese copper, for instance, is incorporated with gold, just as there are silver lead ores. Many metallic designs in decorative work prove far more effective in appearance from being produced in other metals than gold and silver, although, regarded individually and relatively to other metals and alloys, the latter maintain their superiority of appearance. The ornamentist turns to rich account the natural hues of metals by processes which heighten or deaden their lustre, and so operating on their surfaces as that these shall reflect special angles of light. Thus silver is so oxidized as to supply contrasts with its pristine hue, and soften its aggressiveness to the sight. Steel may be so tempered as to acquire a blue hue of peculiar richness, looking admirable in connection with oxidized silver; and copper by surface treatment, may be greatly variegated so as to give vigor and expression to design, shades in the tints being shown of remarkable depth; the same is the case with bronze, while brass may be fire-gilt, or be given a glowing, finished face, or be dulled with superb effect so as to present a surface apparently coated with scattered grains of the metal that display both dull and bright tones. That oxidized silver is lessening in favor for ornamental designs is largely chargeable to its not being combined in these with other metals. Its negative quality is doing away with the aggressive appearance of burnished silver. The dark hues added to surface to variegate it in relief work have much the appearance of inartistic shading. We have inspected some picture frames recently imported that have a moulded face in one tone throughout, and so avoid a bizarre effect. In no form of decoration of interiors have such melancholy failures occurred as in the coating of walls and ceilings with metal plates in relief ornament. The larger the space afforded, the more wearisome the duplicated designs which are proportionately increased in number. No bronzing or painting can disguise the fact that the room is cased in iron. There is a sharpness and hardness in the relief contours. Of late years there has been originated a class of furniture in brass which has proved highly acceptable for lightness and brightness. The tables in this metal—tables highly ornamented as a rule—are of small dimensions, as in the parlor or drawing-room any great amount of brass would be too strongly contrastive; in sleeping apartments beds and small cabinets in this metal find an appropriate place where they are in company with light-colored surroundings, including hangings of delicate tones, which modify the brilliancy of surface. Some of these cabinets are backed with beveled mirrors, and are supplied with Mexican onyx shelves.

How charming the lightness of the modern chandelier in this metal as compared with its massive predecessors, some of which were miniature architectural constructions showing pillared arches that supported nothing, often accompanied by the absurdity of flying buttresses. The more minimized the material used in these and candelabras, as in brackets or other decorative objects, the more graceful the forms they are capable of assuming. An enforced departure in art is often prolific of good results. A chandelier, like the center-piece of a dining-table, should offer as little obstruction to the sight as possible. In lightness in this article, combined with artistic grace, we have returned to the practice of former times. One of the antique candelabras of dead black iron has slender rounder central stem, whilst the supports of the branches are mere threads of metal enwrapped in tendrils of a climbing plant with here and there a leaf, is in every way pleasing to the sight. The giving to iron this dead black hue—a hue exceedingly rich in depth of effect—is an old art recovered.

In many jardinières the designs are formed in perforated work, the interior lining, which forms the actual receptacle, being of deep toned copper.